

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER VALUES

UPPER MULCHATNA RIVER | Alaska | Fall 2018

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT AND THE UPPER MULCHATNA RIVER

The national wild and scenic rivers system was created by Congress in 1968 (Public Law 90-542; 16 USC 1271 et seq.) to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, or recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The act is notable for safeguarding the special character of these rivers, while also recognizing the potential for their appropriate use and development. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing goals for river protection.

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Congress declares that the established national policy of dam and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, October 2, 1968

Rivers may be designated by Congress or, if certain requirements are met, the Secretary of the Interior. Each river is administered by either a federal or state agency. Designated segments need not include the entire river and may include tributaries. Rivers may be managed through a partnership with communities, special councils, and state governments.

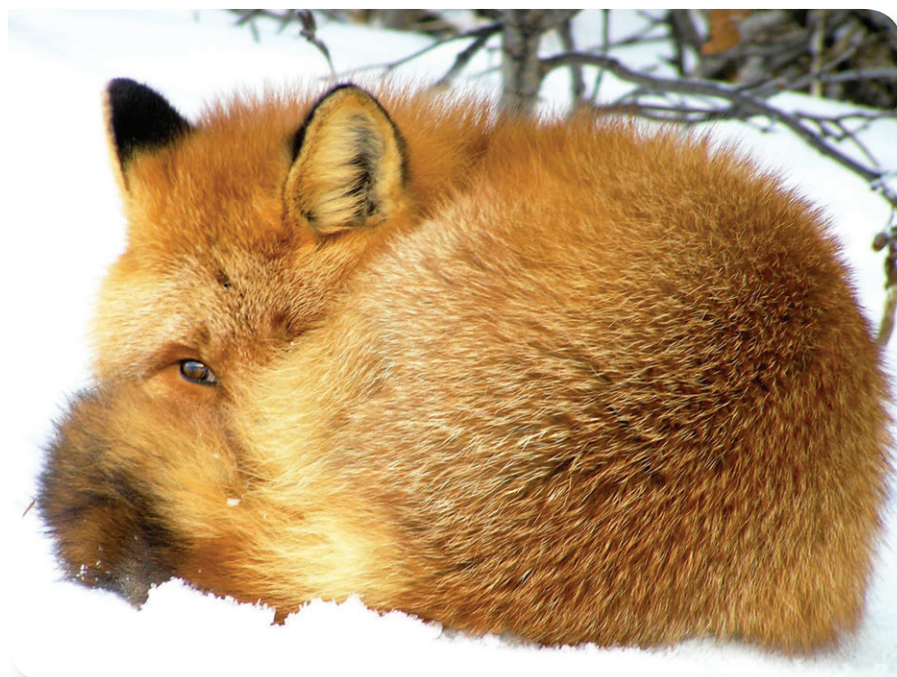


The Mulchatna River originates in the Chigmit Mountains (a sub-range of the Alaska and Aleutian Ranges) at Turquoise Lake and flows west through its foothills approximately 22 miles to the border of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. The river continues an additional 49 miles through state land before joining the Chilikadrotna, then continues 113 miles before joining the Nushagak River, which flows an additional 104 miles into Bristol Bay near Dillingham.

In order to protect the Upper Mulchatna's free-flowing characteristics, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs), the 24 miles of the Upper Mulchatna within the area designated as "national park" of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve were designated a wild river in 1980 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) under the provisions of the 1968 National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law 96-487). Wild rivers are rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive, and waters unpolluted. These represent the vestiges of primitive America.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER VALUES

Each river in the national system is administered with the goal of protecting and enhancing the values that caused it to be designated. Outstandingly remarkable values, free-flowing condition, and water quality form the three pillars of protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.



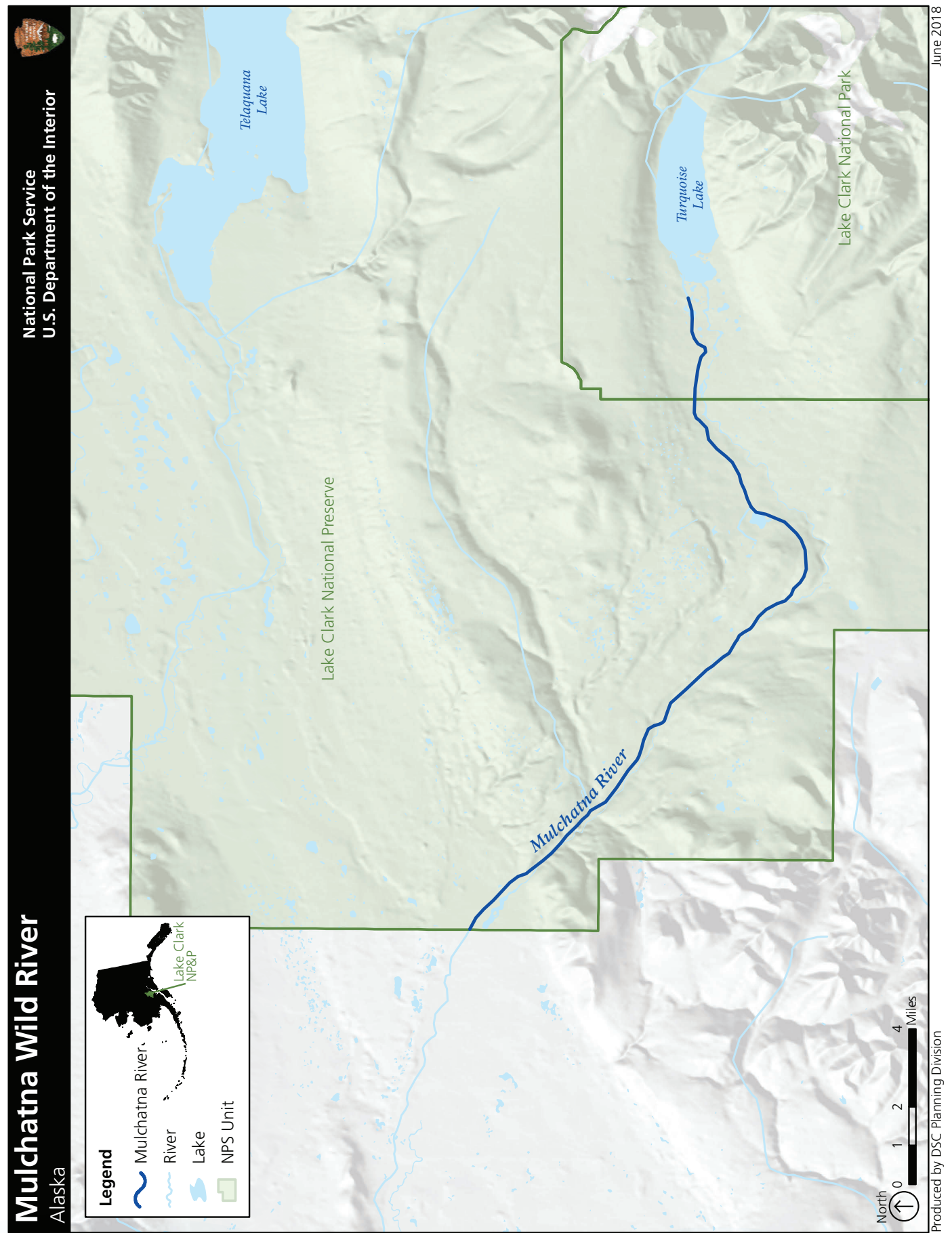
**Outstandingly
Remarkable Values**



Free-flowing Condition



Water Quality





OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES

Outstandingly remarkable values are defined by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as the characteristics that make a river worthy of special protection. Thus, the foundation for wild and scenic river management is a clearly defined set of ORVs. The Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council has issued criteria for identifying and defining these values. The criteria guidance states that:

An ORV must be river related or dependent. This means that a value must

- be located in the river or on its immediate shorelands (generally within 0.25 mile on either side of the river)
- contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem
- owe its location or existence to the presence of the river

An ORV must also be rare, unique, or exemplary at a comparative regional or national scale. Such a value would be one that is a conspicuous example from among a number of similar values that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary.

The Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council provides additional criteria for assessing each ORV category listed in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, noting that the criteria may be modified to make them more meaningful to a particular river. The council also notes that, while no specific national evaluation guidelines have been developed for the “other similar values” mentioned in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, agencies may assess additional river-related values including, but not limited to, hydrology, paleontology, and botany. Specific criteria for identifying ORVs are included below.

Table 1. Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria for the Wild Rivers in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve

Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Scenic Values	Landscape elements visible from the river and its banks result in notable views that characterize rivers in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. The landscape elements of landform, vegetation, water, color, contrast, and related factors result in notable or exemplary visual features and/or attractions. When analyzing scenic values, additional factors—such as seasonal variations in vegetation, scale of cultural modifications, and the length of time negative intrusions are viewed—may be considered.
Recreational Values	River-related recreational opportunities attract, or have the potential to attract, visitors from throughout or beyond the region of comparison or are unique, rare, or exemplary within the region. Visitors are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources for recreational purposes. River-related opportunities could include, but are not limited to, sightseeing, wildlife observation, camping, photography, hiking, fishing, and boating.



Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Geologic Values	Examples of geologic features, processes, or phenomena are unique or rare within Alaska and/or nationally, either individually or in combination. The river corridor contains at least one example of a geologic feature, process, or phenomenon that is unique or rare within the region of comparison. The feature(s) may be in an unusually active stage of development, may represent a textbook example, and/or may represent a unique or rare combination of geologic features (erosional, volcanic, glacial, or other geologic structures).
Fish Values	Fish values may be judged on the relative merits of fish populations, habitat, or a combination of these river-related conditions. Populations The river is nationally or regionally an important producer of resident and/or anadromous fish species. Of particular significance is the presence of wild stocks and/or federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Diversity of species is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of “outstandingly remarkable.” Habitat The river provides exceptionally high-quality habitat for fish species indigenous to the region of comparison. Of particular significance is habitat for wild stocks and/or federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Diversity of habitats is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of “outstandingly remarkable.”



Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Wildlife Values	The river corridor provides exceptionally high-quality and nearly continuous habitat for wildlife. Biological processes along the river corridor have exceptionally high integrity in that they are relatively intact and undisturbed throughout the entire length of the river corridor. Wildlife values may be judged on the relative merits of either terrestrial or aquatic wildlife populations, habitat, or a combination of these conditions. Populations The river corridor contains nationally or regionally important populations of indigenous wildlife species. Of particular significance are species considered to be unique and/or populations of federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Diversity of species is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of "outstandingly remarkable." Habitat The river corridor provides exceptionally high-quality habitat for wildlife of national or regional significance and/or may provide unique habitat or a critical link in habitat conditions for federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Contiguous habitat conditions are such that the biological needs of the species are met. Diversity of habitats is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of "outstandingly remarkable."



Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Cultural and Historic Values	Archeological Values The river corridor contains archeological sites and areas important to traditional cultures; these help perpetuate cultural and spiritual traditions among Native Alaskans. Several archeological sites and traditional cultural properties are listed (or are eligible for listing) in the National Register of Historic Places and have unique or rare characteristics, are regionally important for research, or tangibly link Alaska Natives to their heritage. Examples include burial grounds; petroglyphs; the oldest known human-use site in a region; and streams that support traditional agriculture, subsistence fishing, or spiritual ceremonies.
	Historic Values The river corridor contains at least one site or feature associated with a significant event, an important person, or a cultural activity of the past that was rare or unique in the region. Historic structures, buildings, and landscapes are listed (or are eligible for listing) in the National Register of Historic Places, have either national or regional significance, and do not impede or divert the free flow of the river. In most cases, a historic site or feature is at least 50 years old.
	Prehistoric Values The river corridor contains at least one site where there is evidence of occupation or use by Native Alaskans. A site must have unique or rare characteristics or exceptional human-interest value(s). A site may have national or regional importance for interpreting prehistory, may be rare and represent an area where a culture or cultural period was first identified and described, may have been used concurrently by two or more cultural groups, or may have been used by cultural groups for rare sacred purposes. Many such sites are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Based on these criteria and a careful analysis of the designated reaches of the Mulchatna River, the National Park Service (NPS) has determined that several ORVs are present: scenic, recreational, fish, and cultural values. A set of broad statements has been developed that articulates each ORV for the entire river designation.



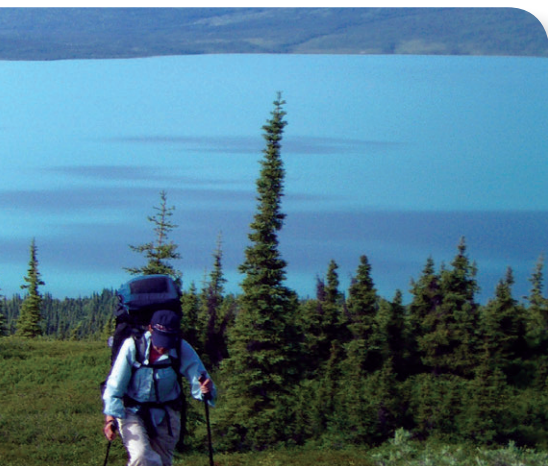
Scenic Values

Part of the Upper Mulchatna flows through designated wilderness (ANILCA 1980) and part flows through eligible wilderness; the entire reach has exceptional wilderness character. The corridor has few traces of human use or habitation, and natural geologic, hydrologic, and biologic processes are free from on-site modern human influence. The headwaters of the river exist in a primitive and natural state.

Scenery along the Mulchatna is exceptional, particularly near its Turquoise Lake headwaters. Turquoise Lake (about 5 miles long) is surrounded by peaks that rise 3,000 to 5,000 feet above the lake's 2,500-foot elevation. The lake is aptly named, with its striking jade-green hue due to fine glacial sediments in the water; the river retains much of this color through its headwaters.

Downstream, the Chigmit Mountain foothills continue to provide a scenic backdrop until the river cuts through the Bonanza Hills. Like the Chilikadrotna, views closer to the lake offer better mountain scenery, while downstream reaches offer flatter terrain, increasing upland spruce, and thicker riparian vegetation that emphasize horizontal and foreground dimensions.

Like the Chilikadrotna, the channel has some visible glacial erratics (large boulders) that add scenic diversity, although the Mulchatna's are not as distinctive in color or form. In contrast, at approximately river mile 17, the Mulchatna features a short, narrow canyon north of the Bonanza Hills, which constricts the river and offers some canyon scenery.



Recreational Values

Against the backdrop of its scenic and historic resources, the Mulchatna offers exceptional recreational opportunities including floating, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, hiking, hunting, trapping, and photography.

The corridor provides exceptional opportunities for solitude. Since only a few groups float the river each year, most trips are unlikely to encounter each other. Due to annual flooding that removes most evidence of previous use (e.g., fire rings at a few campsites or lake outlet staging areas), most recreationists will not observe signs of past visitors, enhancing wilderness character. More groups float the Chilikadrotna than they do the Mulchatna River because the Chilikadrotna is easier. The first 50 or 60 miles of the upper Mulchatna River can be shallow, rocky and below the canyon there are numerous log jams. The river often flows swiftly through the forest constantly cutting new channels and making for many short, but difficult, portages.

Although access via float plane to the outlet of Turquoise Lake is straightforward, weather can be harsh, and the surrounding terrain is rugged and remote. During periods of low flows, the upper reaches of the river can also be challenging to negotiate because the shallow channel exposes boulders. Under the current management regime, there are few use restrictions and visitors have considerable liberty on how they explore the river corridor. While most groups likely only spend 2 to 3 days in the designated segment of the river, most are on the Mulchatna for up to a week. Longer trips are possible, including a trip to Dillingham on Bristol Bay via the Nushagak River that would

take several weeks. Taken together with its natural setting, the Mulchatna offers visitors a textbook version of the headwaters of a wilderness river.

For most of the designated reach, the river is a fast-flowing Class I-II river boatable in a canoe, kayak, raft, or pack raft. The Mulchatna generally offers a less dramatic, but more demanding, floating experience than the Chilikadrotna. In periods of low water, many exposed rocks occur in the upper Mulchatna River for several miles below Turquoise Lake, and the canyon is swift with many rocks and a Class III ledge drop. Below the canyon are numerous log jams and swift water flowing through the forest that may require numerous short portages.

Except during periods of high water, the Mulchatna—like the Chilikadrotna—has many large sand or gravel bars offering plentiful places to fish and camp, providing considerable schedule flexibility.



The well drained slopes and ridges at the headwaters provide excellent hiking, and there are good off-trail hiking opportunities in the Bonanza Hills. Most of the river corridor on preserve lands is also accessible for sport hunting and trapping.

Fishing is good for grayling, rainbow trout, and salmon. Although some anglers may time trips to target specific salmon runs (e.g., Chinook in late June/early July, coho in August and early September), others focus on native species that are available through most of the floating season. Anglers fish with bait, lures, and flies from boats and shore.

The Mulchatna also offers excellent opportunities for wildlife observation for photographic or hunting purposes. Although wildlife numbers are not unusually high for the region, open vistas make sightings likely and enhance anticipation of sightings, particularly compared with the less-open country downstream of the designated segment where terrain is more forested and riparian vegetation is thicker.

Finally, the Mulchatna offers stellar winter skiing and snowmachine opportunities, although access is far from population centers and use is light.

Fish Values

There are several known fish species in the Upper Mulchatna, including rainbow trout, Arctic grayling, Dolly Varden, and three species of salmon (Chinook, coho, and chum). Fish densities are similar to other alpine clearwater streams in western Alaska, and the upper reaches of the river provide excellent rearing and spawning habitat to support its various fisheries.



Cultural Values – Historic

During the late pre-historic and historic period, the important Dena'ina Telaquana Trail connected Kijik Village on Lake Clark with other villages in the Nushagak and Kuskokwim drainages. The Telaquana Trail crosses both the upper Chilikadrotna and upper Mulchatna Rivers at traditional fords, which remain crossable even during higher summer flows.

The upper Chilikadrotna and Mulchatna River corridors were also traditional caribou and Dall's sheep hunting grounds of the Lake Clark Dena'ina. There are several Dena'ina place names documented on both upper rivers, affirming Dena'ina hegemony in the area. Russian fur trading in the late 1700s and 1800s further confirms Dena'ina use of the Mulchatna basin.

The upper Mulchatna was likely first prospected by Americans when California gold miners poled boats more than 200 miles up the Nushagak, Mulchatna, and Chilikadrotna Rivers to the Bonanza Hills where they prospected. Prospectors also came to the Bonanza Hills in the early 1880s via Iliamna Bay, Iliamna Portage, Lake Clark, and likely the Telaquana Trail.

COMPARISONS TO OTHER DESIGNATED WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

The park defines the region of significance as the Bristol Bay watershed. The character of the Upper Mulchatna is similar to the Chilikadrotna and Alagnak, but differs from other designated rivers in the western Alaska Range and Bristol Bay region, including the Tlikakila and Aniakchak. Values for the Tlikakila are discussed above. The Aniakchak flows out of a volcanic caldera and has more challenging whitewater and access. The Upper Mulchatna primarily differs from the Chilikadrotna in having more glacially colored water because it only has one lake available for sediment settling.

The scenic, fish, recreation, and historic values of the Mulchatna River are unique and/or exemplary in the Bristol Bay region. The corridor is a pristine example of an alluvial outwash river system in the Lime Hills ecoregion without human development or influence. Existing water quality, fish, wildlife, vegetation, and similar conditions can serve as ecological controls for assessing climatic or other large-scale changes without potentially confounding influences of mining or road development, or to compare with other rivers in the region that are not protected.





As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historic places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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